

The Purpose and Benefit of Fasting in Islam

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***Abstract:** The practice of fasting is one of the commendable habits for Muslims. This research aims to explore the benefits of fasting from both religious and health perspectives. The research methodology employed in this study is qualitative. The findings from the conducted research reveal that fasting not only serves the purpose of enhancing faith in God but also yields benefits in terms of both physical and mental health.*

***Keywords:** Fasting, mental, health, and faith.*

BACKGROUNDS

Fasting, in the Arabic language, is called "as-saum" or "as-siyam," which means to restrain oneself. Fasting is also a beginning to renew our souls that may have been affected by ailments, both physical and mental. In other words, fasting can bring about complete health for the body and mind without resorting to therapy, medications, and other medical processes. As for the virtues of fasting: Forgiveness of Sins: The Prophet Muhammad SAW. said, "Whoever fasts Ramadan with faith and seeking Allah's reward, his past sins will be forgiven" (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim) and Special Worship, Fasting is a unique act of worship with a special status in the sight of Allah. Besides being a powerful shield against one's desires, fasting is also the only worship that is truly pure and sincere for the sake of Allah.

Fasting itself is divided into two types: obligatory fasting (such as Ramadan and vow fasting) and voluntary fasting (such as Monday-Thursday fasting, Rajab fasting, Prophet David's fasting, and so on). Performing obligatory fasting is a mandatory act of worship, and

if neglected, it incurs sin. On the other hand, voluntary fasting is a recommended practice; it is acceptable if not performed, but if observed, it brings additional rewards.

Fasting in the Islamic faith for Muslims, whether it be mandatory (*wajib*) or voluntary (*sunnah*) fasting is not something unfamiliar. Abstaining from activities such as drinking and eating, starting from the dawn until the sun sets, is considered an act of worship. There are mandatory fasts (to be observed by those capable) and voluntary fasts (permissible if one is able). Fasting has been practiced since ancient times, not only by Muslims but also by followers of other religions, each in their own respective beliefs.

The Almighty Allah, who created everything along with the wisdom behind it, is exemplified in the practice of fasting. Fasting is not only intended as a manifestation of the faith of His followers but also serves to benefit our physical and spiritual well-being for those who observe it. During fasting, the body undergoes a series of beneficial changes. Fasting activity allows the digestive system to rest, and this affects the entire body, especially on a macro scale. During fasting, biochemical changes occur at the cellular level.

At the macro level, when the digestive system is at rest, the required energy is sourced from the body's carbohydrate and fat reserves. In a state of mental balance, the body's biochemical reactions proceed more smoothly, purposefully, and without harm. This aligns with the medical principle that excessive consumption of food and drinks can endanger organs such as the stomach, liver, and heart, as well as lead to issues such as obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

Medical science also indicates that fasting has health benefits, both physically and mentally. Furthermore, fasting also has a profound spiritual dimension, aiding in the development of piety (*taqwa*) both outwardly and inwardly. Therefore, in the practice of fasting as a religious observance, we can witness the mysteries and greatness of Allah's knowledge, teaching us the profound purpose and benefits of His commandments.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Essentially, individuals observing fasting abstain from the midday meal and expedite their morning repast. This practice, beyond fulfilling the obligatory nature of fasting as an expression of obedience to Allah SWT, is elucidated by Putsanra (Aqiilah, 2020) in terms of its implications for physical health. From this perspective, fasting yields numerous benefits, such as increasing human growth hormones, burning fat in the body, enhancing brain function,

regulating triglycerides, reducing blood pressure, decreasing the risk of aging, addressing insulin resistance, and preventing other dangerous diseases.

Fasting not only imparts physical benefits but also exerts a positive influence on psychological well-being. It contributes to mental health by engendering a sense of tranquility, serenity, and contentment, mitigating aggression and fear, alleviating feelings of anxiety and depression, fostering empathy and sympathy, augmenting emotional intelligence, and promoting a positive mood for those observing it. Recent research featured in the Journal of the American Heart Association underscores the advantageous effects of Ramadan fasting in reducing blood pressure, body weight, and body fat levels. The period of Ramadan fasting presents an opportune occasion to re-embrace a healthy lifestyle, as through fasting, individuals can regulate their dietary patterns.

METHODOLOGY

The author employs qualitative research to gain a deeper understanding of a particular issue (Cassell & Symon, 2004). The literature review approach is utilized in this study to delve further into various relevant theories and previous research. Literature review plays a role in presenting various theories that support the research argumentation (Nakano & Muniz, 2018), along with a quantitative method involving data collection through the completion of questionnaires by a total of 25 respondents.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From the quantitative research results obtained through questionnaires administered to 25 respondents ranging in age from 18 to 30 years, the author derived findings indicating unanimous agreement among all 25 respondents regarding the benefits of fasting, both in religious and health aspects. Respondents articulated personal experiences, highlighting how fasting serves not only as an obligation for Muslims and a means of abstaining from sinful behavior but also contributes to physical health, including weight reduction and an enhanced sense of vitality.

Fasting also serves as a means to attain salvation in both the worldly life and the hereafter. The Prophet Muhammad SAW said: "From Abu Hurairah 'Fasting is a shield, so do not utter obscenities or behave foolishly. If someone insults you or seeks to pick a fight, say: 'Indeed, I am fasting' (repeating it twice). By the One in whose hand my soul is, the smell of the mouth of a fasting person is more pleasant to Allah than the fragrance of musk. He gives

up his food, drink, and desires for My sake. Fasting is for Me, and I will reward it. The good deed is multiplied ten times over.' For the one who fasts, there are two joys: the joy of breaking his fast and the joy of meeting his Lord due to his fast." (Narrated by Bukhari)."

From the mentioned hadith, it is stated that fasting serves as a safeguard for individuals against all sinful actions such as using harsh language, fighting, insulting, and other wrongful deeds. During fasting, the encouragement of virtuous deeds is heightened, and the reward is directly bestowed by Allah SWT with multiplied blessings. While fasting, the joy of breaking the fast is felt, and it is hoped that it will cultivate empathy and compassion towards the less fortunate. Fasting also serves as a means for individuals to meet more frequently and draw closer to Allah SWT. Therefore, it is imperative for us to always express gratitude and appreciation to Allah SWT for the bestowed blessings. Below is a more comprehensive elaboration on the benefits and objectives of fasting for both faith and health for those who observe it:

The purpose of fasting as a sign of faith

Some human beings around the world observe the fasting ritual. Various religions, not only Islam, have teachings related to religious practices, one of which is fasting. Fasting is not exclusive to the Islamic community; it is also practiced by followers of other religions such as Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and others. Different religions instruct their adherents to observe fasting according to their respective procedures and implementations, with the common goal of drawing closer to the Creator and demonstrating faith as creatures of His creation.

1. Internal and External Faith

Fasting has long been a practice in various religions and cultures around the world. Its spiritual and religious values refer to various theories of faith in the study of Islamic theology. Therefore, it can be said that the construction of faith includes two fundamental dimensions: the internal dimension (felt within the heart and soul and not visible externally) and the external dimension (something that is visibly evident).

a) The implementation of fasting in the internal dimension

The internal (internal act) comprises the conditions and inner actions (spiritual) that involve the realms of cognition, affection, and conation together. This internal dimension consists of wholehearted belief in various doctrines of Islamic teachings, such as the pillars of

faith. Besides the dimension of belief, there is also a dimension of inner attitude in accepting circumstances, along with a strong desire to live life in accordance with the commands and rules of Allah. The attitudes encompass honesty, patience, and self-awareness.

The purpose of fasting in the internal dimension of faith is to instill a sense of reluctance in an individual to engage in disliked or inappropriate actions during fasting. Feeling observed by the power of Allah SWT while fasting leads a person to avoid improper behavior and increase engagement in beneficial activities such as reciting the Quran, sending blessings, and practicing other recommended actions. Reluctance to commit sins arises because one knows that the act of fasting would be in vain if accompanied by reprehensible deeds. Over time, fasting trains an individual's faith, fostering a sense of piety toward Allah that encourages a genuine and sincere approach to fasting. This means that through fasting, a person trains oneself to be honest in the implementation of worship and in their faith in Allah. With repeated practice, the sense of piety toward Allah grows and develops, making the individual afraid and ashamed of violating His prohibitions.

b) The implementation of fasting in the external dimension

The external dimension (external act) involves actions of the body that are empirical, including verbal expressions and other observable behaviors. These outward behaviors are a manifestation of the internal conditions and actions. While fasting, in addition to guarding one's heart, it is necessary to maintain a positive attitude towards others. For example, this includes being mindful of one's words, speaking only kind things, and refraining from criticism. During fasting, individuals are prohibited from engaging in certain activities that they might typically do on other days. Breaking a habit can be challenging for someone accustomed to a particular behavior. Therefore, if a fasting person does not have strong faith in Allah, they may inadvertently violate the prohibitions of fasting. Thus, fasting serves as training for the improvement of an individual's faith.

Consequently, by guarding one's heart and actions during fasting, we can enhance our faith. Muslim individuals, obligated to observe fasting, especially during the month of Ramadan, will continually practice maintaining both their outward and inward conduct. This practice contributes to the fulfillment of the purpose of fasting: strengthening the faith of the Muslim community.

The benefits of fasting for health

Fasting undertaken without a foundation of faith in Allah SWT often culminates in self-imposed hardship. Conversely, adhering to the tenets of Islamic teachings in the observance of fasting yields dual advantages, encompassing inner serenity, the alleviation of mental disarray, and emancipation from reliance solely on worldly needs, both physical and spiritual. Beyond its advantages in promoting tranquility and mental well-being, fasting has been correlated with discernible health benefits for the body. The symbiotic relationship between physical and mental health underscores their interdependence, necessitating a harmonious management approach. It is imperative to acknowledge that mental health exerts a profound impact on physical well-being, and reciprocally, physical health influences mental equilibrium.

2. Fasting for physical and mental health

Fasting has a significant impact on the health of the body, both physically and mentally. During fasting, the body undergoes metabolic changes that can bring several benefits. In addition to physical benefits, fasting also has positive mental effects, including increased self-discipline, spiritual focus, and a sense of well-being. However, it is important to approach fasting wisely, avoiding dehydration and balancing the diet during breaking the fast to maximize health benefits while maintaining body fitness.

Moreover, fasting serves three functions, all of which have integral implications between human variation and divinity. These three functions are as follows: first, fasting serves as a means to direct (tahzib) an individual towards the essence of humanity; second, fasting acts as a pattern to shape the soul's characteristics (ta'dib); and third, fasting serves as a training medium to strive to become a perfect and exemplary human or a reflection of God (tadrib). These three functions of fasting work synergistically to form a linear continuum that leads to the ultimate goal of attaining taqwa.

a) Benefits of fasting for physical health

During fasting, it becomes a natural process of body detoxification, meaning the body allows the digestive organs to rest and function more optimally. Restricting food and drink during fasting helps minimize the accumulation of toxins in the body. By observing full-day fasting, accumulated toxins in the body can be eliminated through urine and sweat. Additionally, fasting allows for weight reduction (addressing obesity), with the condition that one maintains stability and avoids excessive or gluttonous consumption of food during both pre-dawn and sunset meals. While fasting, the body's immune system experiences an

enhancement, characterized by a decrease in inflammation markers, lymphocytes, monocytes, and granulocytes. Additionally, fasting can aid in weight reduction to prevent an increase in inflammation and oxidative stress in the body, which could potentially lead to metabolic syndrome.

b) Benefits of fasting for mental health

In addition to its physical benefits, fasting also has psychological advantages. Psychologically, fasting contributes to mental health in various ways. Some of these benefits include maintaining a positive mood, increasing resilience to stress, improving sleep quality, and enhancing self-control. One psychological benefit of fasting is its role in promoting a positive mood. This occurs because, in the initial weeks of fasting, the body adapts to the feeling of hunger. Hunger releases catecholamines, and these catecholamines contribute to an improved mood. Catecholamines are a group of hormones that respond to stress, including dopamine, adrenaline, and noradrenaline.

CONCLUSION

From the description of the research findings, the author concludes that indeed, fasting, which is one of the obligations of Muslims, has purposes and benefits for those who observe it. This aligns with the content of the hadith narrated by the Prophet Muhammad SAW, as elaborated above, regarding the connection of fasting as a command from Allah SWT. This pertains to both religious obedience and physical as well as spiritual health. From this, the author wishes to convey that God's command to worship Him is never intended solely to preserve our lives; rather, there are numerous benefits behind it. Fasting also trains individuals to be grateful for the blessings bestowed by Allah. One only truly realizes the immense value of something when it is lost. By abstaining from food and drink during fasting, we come to appreciate the great blessings Allah has granted us. We are continually provided with health and an abundance of sustenance, allowing us to experience the pleasure of food and drink.

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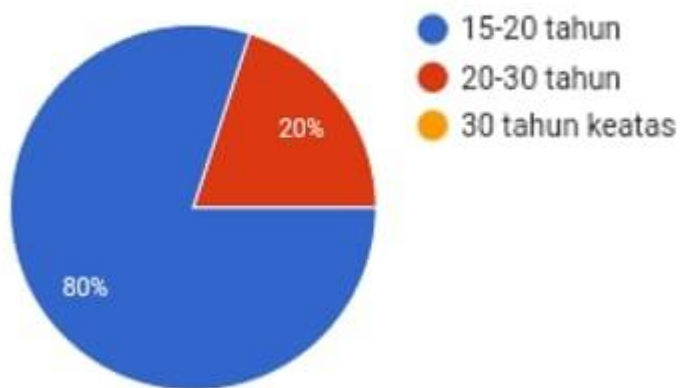
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Diagram 1. Pendapat 25 Responden Mengenai Puasa

Berapa rentang umur anda?

25 jawaban



1. Apa pendapat anda mengenai puasa?

25 jawaban

